



Kevin Brown

Wacky image is part of Urbations' popularity

When you play in a wild and wacky traveling band, the excitement isn't always reserved for the stage.

"One time we had a gig in St. Louis," recalls Andy Boller of Detroit's popular Urbations.

"We were on the highway and there was a guy driving in front of us. We're going about 75 mph, and he kept putting on his brakes.

"We just said, 'Whoa, let's pull off the road.' This guy's nuts. He stepped and pulled a gun on us."

Then we ran," says Boller, laughing. "It happened to mom, dad and the kids on a vacation trip, you wouldn't think it very funny. But when it's told by Boller, main singer and keyboardist with that nutty Detroit band, the Urbations, it approaches slapstick.

Since forming in 1980, the Urbations have been known for a wild, often humorous stage show — complete with band members writing on the floor and crazy cover-versions of oldies — like their reworking of the early '60s hit "It's My Party."

They turn it from wimpy pop to tough '80s rap.

"THAT'S SORT OF our basic image," says Boller, adjusting a thick bandage wrapped around his thumb.

injured in a recent bout with a Mike stand in a Traverse City club.

That wacky image, coupled with the group's trademark horn section and general high musicianship, made them "Detroit's favorite party band," to quote Boller.

But following the release of their fourth record — the first distributed outside the Midwest — Boller says, "We've evolved." He says the band is original material, about 70 percent.

While long-term band goals vary from member to member, Boller — he writes much of the band's material — says he'd like to have a hit record. "I'd like to have a song everyone was singing."

Recorded at Canton's Pearl Sound studio, the new four-song EP is even selling 25-30 copies a week in New York City, now one of the band's four stops.

Early on, the Urbations provided a striking change from most Detroit club bands — those macho-rockers doing Journey and Loverboy covers, or quirky new-waveers more into making their statement than entertaining.

LED BY BARITONE sax player David Swain — he lives just east of the Southfield-Detroit border — the band first performed Sunday nights

at the Soup Kitchen saloon downtown.

A WRIF engineer and employees of the big Detroit newspapers spread the word about the seven-member band, as they played more downtown clubs.

The Urbations played some suburban clubs as well, including the Ranch in Redford, and hooked up with former MC5 manager-White Panther John Sinclair ("He's a poet. He's on his own beam riding the sucker," says Boller), who books them on a Midwest circuit.

"We've played everywhere — Chicago, Cincinnati, Topeka, Iowa — all these college towns in Illinois and Indiana you've never heard of," says Boller.

Earlier this month, the band played at CDGBs and the Pyramid in New York City — also home of their new record company, Celluloid.

Boller says the band hopes to release an album on that independent label, but they'll stop the songs around if necessary. In the meantime, they're back in the clubs.

Their next area gig is Saturday, Nov. 1, at Alvin's, on the Wayne State University campus in Detroit.

second runs

By Louisa Orkutsky
staff writer

For an era that once looked as exotic as mashed potatoes, the 1950s seem to have some longevity as a trend.

It's been a couple of years since people rediscovered the Eisenhower era. Yes, it's still passably cool to openly swoon over kidney-shaped coffee tables and watch reruns of "Route 66" on cable. Even that pop icon, Madonna, sports a reborn Marilyn Monroe look these days.

For those who really want to see the glory that was the 1950s, local and cable television offer a few films that show us the way we thought we were.

HOW TO MARRY A MILLIONAIRE (1953) 3:30 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 8, WDIV. In this day and age, the premise understandably might grind some sensibilities. This was a time when it was fine to be a teacher or a secretary, until you were married. Bear in mind, this film was made before women became their own Yuppies. It's the story of three secretaries on the make to

marry men whose names are Fortune 500 firms. Marilyn Monroe, Betty Grable and Lauren Bacall turn in delightful performances as the trio who blow all their money on a month's rent for a swanky apartment and couture clothing in a last-ditch bid to marry their way to the top of the heap. Monroe thrived in this kind of role and no one can throw a wisecrack like Bacall.

Esoterica lovers take note: the movie is a remake of a 1932 film originally titled "The Greeks Had a Word for Them." Not surprisingly, the name was changed to "Three Broadway Girls." It starred Joan Blondell, Ina Claire and Madge Evans. Try throwing that into a conversation.

THE LEFT HAND OF GOD (1955) 3 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 9, WDIV. Humphrey Bogart plays a downed American flyer in post-World-War-II, pre-Mao China. Bogie assumes the identity of a clergyman to save his neck in a country almost 30 years away from tasting its first Coca-Cola. The politics are toe-the-line Eisenhower era. Cast members include some of

that decade's best supporting acts and topliners: Gene Tierney, Lee J. Cobb, Agnes Moorehead and E.G. Marshall. For those who prefer to retire before dawn, even on a weekend, it's worth time-shifting on the VCR for this one. The rest of us will have to make do by drinking coffee.

KISS ME KATE (1953) Nov. 9, 14, 22, 26 Disney Channel. Loosely based on Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," this movie was originally filmed in 3-D. Water and confetti seemed to land right into the laps of audiences wearing those goofy glasses needed to see the extra-dimensional effect.

In the first half of the movie, Ann Miller gets to show off some 3-D kicks while she dances on top of a piano. The '50s had its own form of wretched excess. But why dwell on this when television viewers can only see the flattened version of this flick? In addition to Miller, the movie showcases Kathryn Grayson and Howard Keel as a bickering acting couple whose offstage shenanigans extend onstage.

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